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ABSTRACT

Although many education for parenthood (EP) programs have been developed and implemented, a formal systematic determination of the attitudes of the groups to be served has yet to be conducted. A 110-item Education for Parenthood Attitude Scale (EPAS) was developed to measure attitudes toward EP, and administered to a sample of high school (N=226) and college (N=452) students. Middle-class high school students had significantly more favorable attitudes toward EP than did working-class students, and high school females had significantly more favorable attitudes than males. There were no significant class or gender differences in the college sample. The results suggest that, at least among high school students, there may be more resistance to EP-type programs among members of working-class families and males. It may be that EP requires a specific orientation program for working-class groups and males to modify their attitudes in order to make them more receptive to EP. (Author)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION FOR PARENTHOOD AND THE RESPONSES OF WORKING- AND MIDDLE-CLASS STUDENTS TO THE INSTRUMENT

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Child rearing traditionally was considered a natural process requiring no training; however, many child development theorists now believe that parents should receive training to improve their child-rearing skills. Consequently, many education for parenthood (EP) programs have been developed and implemented, including in the curriculum such things as prenatal care, physical growth and development, and cognitive and social development. Some of the programs are designed to anticipate and prevent problems in child rearing; others are designed to be used where problems have already developed. Despite the number and variety of these programs, a formal systematic determination of the attitudes of the groups to be served has yet to be conducted (Jekel, 1975; Strom and Johnson, 1978).

Attitudinal research on other human service programs such as public health programs, community mental health programs, and services for children has revealed that certain groups have unfavorable attitudes toward these programs. Specifically, members of lower- and working-class families (as determined by education and occupational status) often express more negative attitudes and are more resistant to human service programs than are members of the middle class (Kolb, 1972; Looff, 1971; Smolensky, 1972; Turner and Darity, 1971). These attitudes are reflected in studies of utilization rates which indicate that middle-class members of the populations being sampled are over represented in the use of these services relative to their distribution in the total population (Cobb, 1972; Gibbs, 1975; Greenley and Mechanic, 1976; Lurie, 1974).

In addition to class differences in attitudes, research also indicates that the child-rearing techniques of lower- and working-class parents are different from those of middle-class parents, with resultant differences in their children's cognitive, language, and social development. Children from lower-class families are frequently at a disadvantage when compared to middle-class children on these skills (Deutsch, 1973; Epstein and Radin, 1975; Tulkin, 1977; Wrightsman, 1972). Other research indicates that the percentage of children with mental health problems is greatest in lower-class families, although children in lower-class families are the least likely to use mental health services (Lurie, 1974).

Attitudinal research has also revealed that males hold more unfavorable attitudes toward the human services than females (Greenley and Mechanic, 1976; Schwab, Warheit, and Fennell, 1975). Further, as the roles of mother and father are becoming less sharply differentiated, and as more women enter the paid labor force, men are beginning to take a more active role in child rearing (Fein, 1978). Yet, as Hamilton (1977) notes, our society does little to prepare males to be fathers.

It is possible then that the people who could benefit the most from an EP program (e.g., members of the working class and males) are also the people who are the most resistant to and have the least favorable attitudes toward such programs. Whereas there does not seem to be a one-to-one relationship between behavior and attitudes for each individual case, attitudes are useful in predicting the behaviors of a known group (Zimbardo,

Ebbesen, and Maslach, 1977). A literature review did not reveal any research on attitudes toward EP in general, or compared by class or gender. This study was conducted to determine these attitudes, and to determine if there is a relationship between these attitudes, social class, and gender. From the research on attitudes toward human services it was hypothesized that middle-class attitudes would be significantly more favorable toward EP than the attitudes expressed by members of the working class, and that female attitudes would be significantly more favorable than those expressed by males.

Method

Subjects. Participating in this study were 226 high school students from three schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and 452 freshmen and sophomore college students from The Pennsylvania State University at University Park. All students in both samples were enrolled in an introductory psychology course. High school and college students were selected to respond to the EPAS as they comprise a major segment of future parents and are likely to be both participants in both EP itself and the development and implementation of future programs. Table 1 presents the number of students per group in each sample. For purposes of analysis of variance, it was necessary to group each sample in a class by sex matrix. The cell sizes are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Procedure. A 110 item Education for Parenthood Attitude Scale (EPAS) was developed from the literature on EP. The first section of the EPAS provided a general attitude scale; the second section provided attitudinal information by class and sex on such specific features of EP as enrollment, attendance, design and administration, curriculum and method of instruction, and results. The last four items on the EPAS provide a test for social desirability response set, as suggested by Smith (1967). The EPAS was then administered to the students at their schools.

Results

Mean scores on the general attitude scale were determined for each cell in both samples. See Tables 3 and 4 below for these figures. The general attitude scale was scored so that a high score indicated favorable attitudes toward EP. The maximum obtainable score was 120, and the minimum was 30.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

The results indicate that there was a significant main effect for social class in the high school sample (F = 3.97, df = 1,222, p = .047) and a significant main effect for gender in the high school sample (F = 9.63, df = 1,222, p = .002). There was no significant interaction effect in the high school sample (F = 2.50, df = 1,222, p = .12).

There was no significant main effect for social class in the college sample (F = 1.31, df = 1,452, p = .25), nor was there a significant main effect for gender (F = 1.19, df = 1,452, p = .28). Further, there was no significant interaction effect (F = 1.10, df = 1,452, p = .30) in the college sample.

Thus, the hypotheses were partially confirmed. Middle-class high school students had significantly more favorable attitudes than did the working-class group, and females had more favorable attitudes than males. There were no significant class or sex differences in the college sample. Social desirability had no influence on the responses to the EPAS in either sample.

Alpha coefficients were calculated as a measure of internal reliability for the general attitude scale derived from items 1 through 30. For the high school sample, alpha was calculated to be .89. The alpha calculated for the responses of the college sample was .88.

Discussion

The results suggest that, at least among high school students, there may be more resistance to EP-type programs among members of working-class

families and males, although they could benefit the most from these programs. Further, there were class and sex differences in the specific areas of enrollment, attendance, design, administration, curriculum, and results, but which are too lengthy to present here.

Research with the EPAS has shown that attitudes are in part a function of the student's level of education. This is important for two reasons. First, many high school students do not elect to continue their education. Thus, it is possible that the attitudes of a large number of parents and potential parents will be similar to those expressed by high school students in this research. Second, many students do not complete high school. Attitudes toward EP may be lower in those students who drop out, as they have shown unfavorable attitudes toward education.

Inasmuch as a relationship exists between expressed attitude and behavior, and as working-class and male high school students have expressed less favorable attitudes, it appears that some effort should be made to encourage attitudinal changes. For those students expressing less favorable attitudes, the rewards for participation in EP programs are likely to appear more unrealistic and remote. It may be that EP requires a specific orientation program for working-class groups and males to modify their attitudes in order to make them more receptive to EP. The orientation program should be designed to make the concept of education for parenthood a more acceptable and desirable means of improving skills at child rearing. An orientation program for staff members of EP programs dealing with working-class groups, and males, would also be desirable, so that staff members would have a better understanding of the attitudes and values of these groups.

Research indicates there is a need to deal with attitudinal differences toward EP. Whereas a major area of emphasis should be in improving the attitudes of working-class members and males, it is likely that most potential users of EP programs would benefit from such attempts. Vriend and Dyer (1973) concluded that the majority of clients who visit a counselor can be considered reluctant to some degree; it is possible that most potential users of EP will also experience some degree of reluctance. Indeed, the overall mean of 83.03 for the high school sample and 86.29 for the college sample on the general attitude scale both fall far short of the maximum obtainable score of 120.

Awareness of students' attitudes toward EP should be a primary goal of those involved in its design and implementation. This study has sought to add a tool that can help EP planners in this pursuit.

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Table 1

Number of Students Included in the Analysis of the General Attitude Scale

	High School	College
Middle Class	74	251
Working Class	152	205
Female	122	304
Male	104	152

Table 2

Group n Within Each Cell for Both Samples

		Middle Class	Working Class
High School	Female	41	81
	Male	33	71
College	Female	107	137
	Male	84	68

Table 3

Cell Means and Standard Deviations

for the High School Sample

	Middle Class	Working Class
Female	85.98	85.36
	SD 11.13	SD 9.56
Male	83.70	78.35
	SD 8.83	SD 11.79

Table 4

Cell Means and Standard Deviations

for the College Sample

	Middle Class	Working Class
Female	85.60	87.80
	SD 9.93	SD 9.88
Male	85.56	85.66
	SD 10.16	SD 8.88